



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
September 16, 2008

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Sonoma County Approves Landmark Program

(Santa Rosa, CA)

On Tuesday, September 16, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors encouraged County staff and the Sonoma County Water Agency to move forward with a program that will provide homeowners and businesses a new way to finance energy efficiency improvements.

AB 811, approved by the Legislature and signed by the governor in July, allows local governments to create voluntary energy efficiency and renewable energy improvement assessment districts. Land owners who opt-in to the district can pay for improvements to their real property that increase their building's energy efficiency, decrease energy use or add renewable energy systems through an assessment paid on their annual tax bill. Eligible improvements could include a wide range of improvements such as home insulation, furnace and air conditioning upgrades, energy-efficient windows, solar panels and heat pumps.

According to County Administrator Bob Deis, "When the program is up and running homeowners will be able to make improvements that will reduce electric and gas bills immediately. But the costs of the improvements will be spread out over time and paid for as an assessment their property tax bill. It's a win for property owners and for the environment."

Demand for the program is expected to be high, as residents and businesses look for ways to reduce energy costs and to lower greenhouse gas emissions. In the city of Palm Desert, which sponsored the legislation and which is the first California location to implement a program, 241 applications have already been received.

"With a population of 82,000, Palm Desert is a lot smaller than Sonoma County and the range of needs is much simpler," Deis said. "We want to make sure that we develop a program that works for a homeowner in Guerneville, an office building owner in Petaluma and a farmer in Geyserville."

Three potential test sites include the Airport Business Park in Santa Rosa, 8th Street East in Sonoma and the town of Geyserville, three areas where the Sonoma County Water Agency has started working with property owners to create "carbon free" communities.

"We've been working for several months with property owners in locations near our wastewater treatment plants to find ways that our recycled water can reduce their energy use," said Water Agency Deputy Chief Engineer Cordel Stillman. "Because water absorbs heat so well, we can use

recycled water and geo-exchange heat pumps to cool or heat buildings, dramatically lowering energy needs.”

In addition to the geoexchange technology, many of the property owners in the Airport Business Park and in Sonoma are considering other ways to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.

“Property owners we have been working with are primed and ready to go. They just need a financing mechanism that makes sense,” Stillman said. “And, because there are relatively few businesses, we can work out the administrative kinks while the county prepares to rollout the program countywide.”

Cities could join the countywide program, rather than create their own assessment districts.

“We hope that cities will see the benefits of joining the countywide assessment district,” Deis said. “With a larger pool of participants, we will lower the costs of financing the bonds and it makes the program more efficient and less expensive to administer.”

For questions, please contact Amy Bolten, Sonoma County Water Agency at 707-547-1981 or amy.bolten@scwa.ca.gov.

Sonoma County Water Agency provides water supply, flood protection and sanitation services for portions of Sonoma and Marin counties. Visit us on the Web at www.sonomacountywater.org.